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December 2009

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Repository Citation

Herries, E. S., Silvia, J. E., Spinney, J. R., & Schutte, K. J. (2009). *A Plan for Sustainable Economic Development within the Indlovu Project*. Retrieved from <https://digitalcommons.wpi.edu/iqp-all/2650>

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A Plan for Sustainable Economic Development within the Indlovu Project

An Interactive Qualifying Project submitted to the
faculty of Worcester Polytechnic Institute in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Science

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December 18, 2009

Abstract

This project investigated how the Indlovu Project, a collection of community-based services and resources located in Monwabisi Park, Cape Town, can become economically self-sustainable through development of new methods of income generation and improving existing operations.

This project report is part of an ongoing research program by students of the WPI CTPC to explore and develop options for sustainable community development in the informal settlements of South Africa. For more information, please go to:

<http://www.wpi-capetown.org/>

The following is an executive summary of a full project report that has been implemented as a website available at: <http://www.wpi-capetown.org/projects/2009/economy/>

Problem Statement

Informal settlements mark the landscape of urban areas in many developing countries around the world. War and rural poverty can cause mass migration of people and often simultaneous growth of informal development. These informal settlements are packed with people, creating an unhealthy and hazardous living situation. Many nations face the daunting task of formalising these settlements, which are often built on vacant government land. Integrating these settlements into the urban areas and improving the conditions within them is a necessary step, but the task is not an easy one. Frequently, displaced individuals move to urban areas to look for work, and stay in the area because they are in dire need of a job (Huchzermeyer & Karam, 2006).

Informal settlements place a burden on the local economies, and prove an additional challenge to local governments, who must not only improve living conditions, but help assimilate these informal settlements into the economic workings of urban areas. The issue of informal settlements has plagued South Africa since the end of apartheid, when many black Africans relocated to large cities in search of a new life with better employment opportunities. Cape Town experienced a large influx of new residents, far more than the economy was able to bear. Consequently, many of the individuals expecting to find opportunities after years of oppression found themselves dwelling on the border of the city along with thousands of others. The temporary houses that were built on the outskirts of the city grew into permanent informal settlements. Improving living conditions is difficult, but a greater challenge is making redevelopment a process that benefits communities by generating income and creating jobs (WPI Cape Town Project Centre, 2008).

Background

Monwabisi Park, located in the township of Khayelitsha, is one of over 220 informal settlements on the outskirts of Cape Town. There are over 20,000 residents within Monwabisi Park, and of that number, nearly 50 percent are unemployed (Coddington, Dignam, Fitzpatrick & Pastor, 2008). A 2005 survey conducted by the City of Cape Town found that the average family size within Khayelitsha is around four people, with an average household income of R606 (\$95) per month (City of Cape Town, 2005a). Though the City of Cape Town is aware of the need for redevelopment efforts in the informal settlements, the process is not an easy one.

Because of the wide range of problems these settlements face, not everything can be addressed at once. The Shaster Foundation, a public benefit organization founded by Dianne Womersley, has been responsible for initiating various projects intended to spur growth within Monwabisi Park. The Shaster Foundation has helped form the Indlovu Project, a series of community-based resources and services including a youth crèche, soup kitchen, guest house and medical clinic. The Indlovu Project currently employs seventeen people and is one of the few entities that has brought employment into the settlement.

Students from Worcester Polytechnic Institute (WPI) have been working with the Shaster Foundation in Monwabisi Park since 2007 to help further plans for sustainable redevelopment. A team of four students in 2008 focused their work on economic growth and made significant progress in laying the foundation for a sewing centre. Sandbags offer jobs to community members who sew them and fill them, and they also can be used in the building projects within the community. Plans for a sewing centre were set in place, and community members were trained, but the centre never became fully operational due to a fire that destroyed the building and sewing machines. As a result of the fire that swept through the Indlovu Project, issues such as payment and management within the sewing centre were never addressed. Although they were able to acquire the facilities and machines and train potential employees, no clear management system or salary arrangement was established, leaving many questions to be explored.

The Shaster Foundation has been very successful in bringing about numerous positive projects to Monwabisi Park, but the goal is that someday the project will be truly community driven. The Shaster Foundation has provided the management and financial resources to operate the Indlovu Project to date, but ideally the project will eventually be completely self-sustaining and run by a community-based organisation. This transition of management creates a number of concerns that need to be addressed including hiring procedures, methods of income generation and the overall sustainability of the project (D. Womersley, personal communication, September 18, 2009).

Methods

The overall goal of this project was to research and develop methods to help the Indlovu Project become an economically sustainable community-driven project. In order to achieve this

goal, our main objective was to draft a sustainability plan for the Indlovu Project including our research and ideas to serve as a reference for the Shaster Foundation to use in the upcoming years. In order to develop a complete sustainability plan, we focused on meeting the following objectives:

- Improving existing methods of income generation
- Exploring new methods of job creation
- Analysing current project operations
- Considering funding, hiring and management issues

Improving existing methods of income generation

Currently, the biggest revenue streams for the project are the volunteer program and the guest house. Thus, as part of the development for the sustainability plan, we researched ways of better advertising these two programs and explored how the volunteer program experience could be improved. To accomplish these goals, we interviewed current volunteers, sent out a ten-question e-mail survey to past volunteers, and spent a night at the Indlovu Project as a team.

Methods of job creation

Upon our arrival in Cape Town, our team started discussing the possibility of a sewing centre at the Indlovu Project. We determined quite early that because of space constraints, community tensions and the state of the community centre that a full sewing operation was not yet possible. Instead our team ran a small sewing centre prototype. One industrial machine was purchased and our team worked with two community members to learn about training methods and test the machine for sewing sandbags. Expansion options were explored and we worked towards making the project sustainable through contacts with an established sewing centre nearby to hopefully form a partnership.

Our team also looked at ways in which tourism and crafting could provide job opportunities within the park. We visited several tourist sites around Cape Town as well as Guga S'thebe, a township tourist centre in Langa, another township in Cape Town. Our team also researched simple crafts that could be made in the settlement along with ways to market and sell them in the new community centre.

Considering funding, hiring and management issues

Hiring and management are critical pieces for the success of the Indlovu Project's future. We explored these issues in connection with our sewing centre proposal and brainstormed ways that hiring can be done in an impartial manner. Our team met frequently with our sponsor and community members to gain input and listen to their ideas. During our time in Cape Town some of these issues were addressed as new project managers were appointed. Ideally the Indlovu Project will be self-sustaining, but our team also looked briefly into the different ways fundraising could help the Indlovu Project. We researched a number of various online donation sites, some that focus on the idea of alternative gifting and donations through the web.

Results and Discussion

Sustainability Plan

At the completion of our project we provided our sponsor, Dianne Womersley of the Shaster Foundation with a sustainability plan, including our ideas for income generation within the Indlovu Project and making the project economically self-sustainable. All of our results fall within various sections of the sustainability plan.

Sewing Centre

We learned valuable information on how to train community members who have never used a sewing machine, but the largest issue facing the sewing centre prototype was how to make the project sustainable after our team left. The industrial machine we purchased was very powerful and not ideal when first learning to sew. After the machine broke several times while our co-researchers were sewing, we realized that a person with greater sewing experience would be needed to sustain the project after we left. This person would need to be able to help when the machine malfunctioned and provide instruction if the centre was to expand to produce more complicated items than sandbags. We made contact with two possible groups who could help sustain the project, the most promising being an independent sewing centre in Harare.

Volunteer Program and Guest House

All the volunteers and guests we contacted had very positive experiences at the Indlovu Project, but many volunteers had valuable suggestions for improvement. Our team compiled a document of suggestions for both the guest house and volunteer program that were included as

part of the sustainability plan presented to the Shaster Foundation. Volunteers are a crucial part of the project's success and we hope that these suggestions will help the Indlovu Project to continue to draw volunteers from across the world. Also included were drafts of a guest house welcome packet and marketing resources for both the guest house and volunteer program.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The Indlovu Project has made a significant difference in the lives of Monwabisi Park residents, and keeping this project economically sustainable is of great importance to the welfare of the community. For the Indlovu Project, generating money is certainly not the end goal, but is a necessity for keeping the project sustainable. When developing our recommendations, we looked for methods that would combine income generation, job creation, and community involvement. To this end, our primary recommendations for a successful and financially feasible project include: a new sewing centre, a strong guest house and volunteer program, and a vibrant, authentic experience for day tourists.

By developing and documenting these plans, we helped to put the community a step closer to full control and management of the Indlovu Project. There is a sense of pride when the community can pull together and provide basic services for everyone. The Indlovu Project's spirit of community-driven redevelopment is a departure from the ordinary way of having external organisations or the government lead re-development. A successful and sustainable Indlovu Project can potentially provide a model for other informal settlements across South Africa.

References

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